



# GREEN LOCKER CLEAN-OUT GUIDE

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As the school year comes to a close, it's time to clear out all the papers, notebooks, school supplies, and other materials that have accumulated in students' lockers and desks throughout the year. All too often, much of these materials get thrown away and sent to landfill when they could be reused or recycled. By having a "green" locker clean-out, your school can significantly reduce this waste. It involves providing bins for students to sort their unwanted locker contents into categories of Donate, Recycle, and Landfill. This activity can be easily adapted for a clean-out of classroom desks.

A Green Locker Clean-Out teaches students and staff how to manage materials more sustainably. Reusing school supplies also saves teachers and families money, and recycling typically costs school districts less to haul than trash. This Green Locker Clean-Out Guide will take you through all the steps of planning and implementation, providing best practices and tips along the way.



## PLANNING:

### Identify leaders and team

- Potential groups to lead: Student environmental club, student council, service clubs, homerooms.
- Reach out to your school administration early on to share your plan and ask for their support.
- Other key people on your team may include: building engineer, custodians, teachers, parent volunteers.

### Pick date(s) and time(s) for the event

- Find out when locker clean-outs typically happen for each classroom/grade level.
- Teachers often stagger the time of day when they have their students clean their lockers to minimize hallway chaos. This could mean you will need to set-up fewer sorting stations since they can be moved to different locations throughout the day.
- Keep in mind that eighth graders and high school seniors often clean their lockers earlier than the rest of the school due to graduation. Plan to include them, too.
- How many bins do you have available for collecting landfill and recycling? Will that impact how many classrooms can participate at the same time? See more in the "Sorting stations" section.

## Plan for what materials you will recycle and donate and how

### Recycling

- What materials can be recycled at your school? If you aren't sure, ask your building engineer, administration, or waste hauler.
- For additional information of what you can recycle or donate, see the Solid Waste Agency of Northern Cook County's [Reuse and Recycle Directory](#).
- Will your school need additional recycling pick-up service during the week of the clean-out? Check with your building engineer or administration.

### Donation

What materials will you collect for donation? Plan what you will do with the items that students put in the Donate box. Ideas:

- Allow students to take from the Donate box while they are cleaning out their own lockers.
- Ask teachers or administrators if they would like to save any or all of the donated items for their classrooms or for next school year.
- Place the open boxes of donated items in a central location after the clean-out and invite students, staff, and parents to help themselves. Post a sign above the donation box.
- Contact a local nonprofit or community center to ask if they would like a donation of gently used school supplies. Examples are the [Creative Chicago Reuse Exchange](#) in Chicago or [SCARCE](#) in Addison, Illinois.
  - Clarify which items they can accept.
  - Plan for how you will get the donation delivered.
  - School volunteers may need to sort through the donations first to make sure the items are in good enough condition to be donated.

AMERICANS THROW AWAY ENOUGH PAPER  
EACH YEAR TO BUILD A 12 FOOT HIGH WALL  
FROM SEATTLE TO NEW YORK



Photo: Sharon McCutcheon/Unsplash

## Sorting stations

### Sorting station bins

- Determine how many sorting stations are needed and where they should be located. This may include classroom stations or sections of hallways. Avoid requiring students to walk a long way to access a sorting station.
- IMPORTANT: Set up the stations so that the collection bins are either right next to each other or spaced no more than a couple feet apart. Spacing them farther apart may increase the likelihood of contamination (students may be less inclined to walk to bins that are farther away and instead dump everything in the closest bin).
- The color of the bins is not critical. If your school does not have blue bins for recycling, it's okay to use other types of containers as long as signs and volunteers make it clear what materials belong where.
- Consider making a rough map of where the sorting stations will be located (and a schedule if the stations need to be moved around throughout the day).
- Reuse empty copy paper boxes or cardboard boxes from the kitchen for donation boxes. You may need to collect these over time in the weeks leading up to the locker clean-out or check with a kitchen manager in advance.

### Liner bags for sorting stations

- Find out from the building engineer or custodian if you should plan on using liner bags for the Landfill or Recycling bins, and if so, be ready with a supply of them for the day of the event.
- Your school's recycling hauler may prefer or require that recycling is collected without a bag or require that it is collected in a different color bag than the trash; check before using bags for recycling.

## Signs for sorting stations (sample signs are attached at the end of this guide)

- Before using these signs or creating your own, determine what materials can be recycled at your school and what materials you want to collect for donation.
- Print the sorting signs in advance, 1 set per station.
- Figure out how you will attach the signs. Attaching the signs at eye-level is ideal (tape sign to a ruler, then tape the ruler to the bin). Taping the signs to the sides of the bins will work, too.

## Sample sorting station set-up



## Promote your Green Locker Clean-Out

Promote the Green Locker Clean-Out in daily announcements, school newsletters, and/or the school website to inform teachers, students, and families about the event. Be mindful about when these announcements need to be submitted so they are most useful for promoting the clean-out.

**IMPORTANT:** Emphasize to students that they should take home items they can reuse themselves and only donate things that their family will no longer need.

## Document the event and measure its impact

This part is optional, but a great way to demonstrate the value of doing a Green Locker Clean-Out. It is also a learning opportunity for students to collect and communicate real data.

- How can you use data and photos to share and celebrate the impact of your event? See the "Post-Clean-Out" section below for ideas.
- Types of data to consider collecting:
  - Number of items (and/or pounds) donated or reabsorbed by students and teachers for reuse
  - Amount recycled (measured by volume or weight)
- Ideas for photos:
  - Students cleaning their lockers and sorting their materials
  - Close-ups showing the contents of each bin
  - Shots that show all the donations or recycling collected from the the whole event

## Roles to fill during the day of the event

Think ahead about the help you will need during the day of the event. Leave enough time to inform helpers of their roles, as well as when and where to show up.

- 1 monitor per sorting station - consider asking for a student from each classroom or parent volunteers
- Photographer (optional)

- Data collectors (optional)
- Someone to take the recyclables and trash to the proper dumpsters (Will it be the custodian or someone else?)
- Volunteers to sort through the items in the Donation box to make sure they are in good enough condition to be donated or stored for later use
- Volunteer to drop off donations, if needed

## DAY-OF-CLEAN-OUT:

- Make a morning announcement to remind everyone that the Green Locker Clean-Out is today. Be sure to emphasize that students should take home items that they can reuse themselves and only donate things that their family will no longer need.
- Gather your supplies:
  - Printed signs, 1 set per sorting station
  - Materials for attaching signs (tape, rulers, etc)
  - 1 Landfill bin, 1 Recycle bin, and 1 Donate box per sorting station
  - Trash liner bags
  - Recycling liner bags, **only if required**
  - Data forms and clipboard, if collecting data (optional)
  - Scale, if measuring weight (optional)
  - Camera (optional)
- Set up your sorting stations and make sure that station monitors are ready.
- Educate students about why it is important to donate or recycle locker items instead of throwing them in the trash.
- Optional: Take pictures of the event to communicate your impact and use for reference in the future.
- Optional: Measure your impact by weighing and counting donated items to show how much waste was diverted from landfill.
- Dispose of the collected recycling and trash into the proper dumpsters.
- Sort through donations that can be reused within the school or by school families and take remaining donations to a donation center.
- Thank everyone who helped with your event.

## POST-CLEAN-OUT:

### Share/celebrate the impact of your event

- Ideas: infographic, story for school newsletter/website, school monitors, morning announcements.
- Include photos, data about landfill diversion or the number of school supplies donated, and a thank you to everyone who participated or helped you along the way.

### Debrief

- Take a few moments to jot down reflections about how the Green Locker Clean-Out went (what worked well and why, what were the glitches, ideas for improvement, who helped, etc).
- To make a Green Locker Clean-Out easier to plan in the future, gather all the planning materials you created for this event and share them with event leaders.

FOR MORE ZERO WASTE SCHOOL RESOURCES, VISIT [WWW.SEVENGENERATIONS-AHEAD.ORG/ZERO-WASTE/ZERO-WASTE-SCHOOLS/](http://WWW.SEVENGENERATIONS-AHEAD.ORG/ZERO-WASTE/ZERO-WASTE-SCHOOLS/).

# DONATE

OR TAKE HOME  
AND REUSE  
YOURSELF : )

## UNUSED OR GENTLY USED SCHOOL SUPPLIES

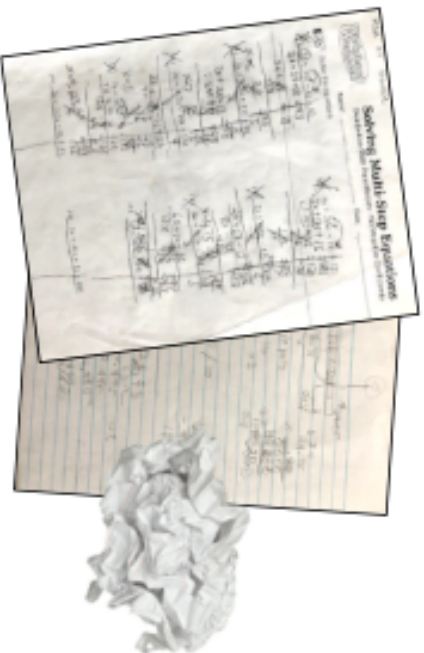


LOCKER  
ACCESSORIES





# RECYCLE



USED PAPER



EMPTY  
PLASTIC, GLASS &  
ALUMINUM CONTAINERS



HEAVILY USED/WORN  
COMPOSITION  
NOTEBOOKS



CARDBOARD



PLASTIC CONTAINERS

# LANDFILL



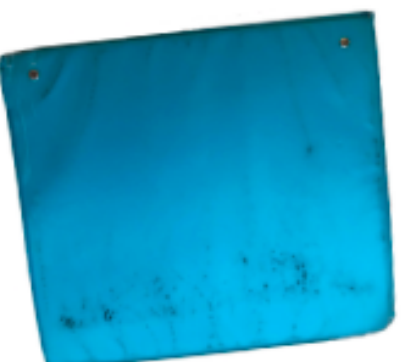
USED NOTEBOOKS WITH  
METAL SPIRAL  
△ (OR RIP OUT METAL &  
RECYCLE PAGES & COVER)  
△



PENCIL  
SHAVINGS



DRIED-UP  
GLUE STICKS



HEAVILY USED BINDERS



PENCIL STUBS &  
DRY PENS

PLASTIC  
BAGS



FOOD  
WRAPPERS